BC YOUTH

COMING TO GRIPS WITH

CANADIAN UNITY

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B.C. YOUTH COMING TO GRIPS WITH CANADIAN UNITY

A Report to
the Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology
(Minister responsible for youth)

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British Columbia Youth Council
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BC Youth

September 16, 1991

Dear Mr. Minister:

It gives me great pleasure to submit to you, on behalf of the British Columbia Youth Council, the final report on "B.C. Youth Coming to Grips with Canadian Unity". We believe that the forums gave British Columbia youth a unique opportunity tc express their views on Canadian unity. Their opinions and recommendations merit serious consideration by the Cabinet Committee on Confederation and the Select Standing Committee on Constitutional Matters and Intergovernmental Relations, as these committees participate in formulating a provincial position on constitutional reform.

The forums have benefited from the collaboration and assistance of many individuals. Council members assisted in the planning of the overall forum process and in detailed preparation for the forums in their communities. In addition, they moderated the day-long event. Able and generous assistance was provided by members of the Steering Committee. In every forum, a panel of speakers created a level of excitement about Canadian unity and raised a variety of issues for the consideration of forum participants. Young volunteers in every community contributed a full day of their time while facilitating the small group sessions.

Young people were responsible for every aspect of carrying out the project, from planning the forums to writing the final report. This truly has been a project undertaken by youth on behalf of youth.

Council members were impressed by the interest, optimism, and enthusiasm of forum participants. Some participants came considerable distances to attend the forums (for example, from Keremeos to Kelowna, or from New Aiyansh to Terrace). The forum day was long, but many small groups worked through refreshment breaks and into lunch break in order to prepare thorough reports for the large group. Their commitment to the forum process is a clear reflection of the importance they attach to Canadian unity, and of their concern for our country.

B.C. Youth Council

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We would like to express our thanks to you and to the Honourable Bruce Strachan, who was Minister Responsible for Youth at the time that this project was undertaken, for your support. Young people will live with the consequences of the decisions made today regarding the future of Canada. We applaud your assistance in ensuring that their voices are heard during the public consultation process.

The British Columbia Youth Council is ready to respond directly to the recommendations and to assist with other initiatives. We will seek a meeting with you to outline the most important findings of the report.

Yours truly,

Dean Crawford
Chairperson

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Marguerite Pierre, a cooperative education student from Simon Fraser University, who, as forum coordinator, was instrumental in planning the forums, attended all 12, prepared summaries, and wrote the final report;

Terry Worobetz, the B.C. Youth Newsletter Editor, for editing the final report;

Joan Mason and Linda Taylor, the Council Administrative staff, for their assistance and extra hours in supervising and carrying out the forum project;

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The members of the Youth Forum Steering Committee: Rob Koot, Heather Workman and Dean Crawford of the B.C. Youth Council; Susan McClure and Jacynthe Bouchard, Policy Analysts, Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology; Gordon Moffat, Frank Roemer and Denny Grisdale of the B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association; Lynne Ewing, Intergovernmental Relations; and Bob Williams, Manager, Public Affairs, Ministry of Environment.

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Rob Turenne, a Career Preparation student at Esquimalt Secondary School, for the design of the forum poster, kit folder and report cover;

Colleges and school districts for making their facilities available at minimal cost;

The volunteers, who donated their time to facilitate the small group sessions;

The speakers, who so eloquently voiced their hopes and aspirations for a new vision of Canada;

The press for its assistance in publicizing the forums; and

The many individuals and youth groups, who publicized the forum and assisted young people in attending the forum in their community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March, 1991, the B.C. Youth Council was asked by the The Honourable Bruce Strachan, former Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and the Minister Responsible for Youth, to hold a series of regional forums in order to gather the opinions, ideas and recommendations of the youth of British Columbia about Canadian unity and the future of Canada. Twelve communities around the province were chosen to ensure that the various economic, regional and ethnic diversity of the youth of British Columbia were represented. The 12 locations were: Vancouver, Castlegar, Kamloops, Comox, Cranbrook, Terrace, Prince George, Surrey, Chilliwack, Dawson Creek, Kelowna and Victoria.

The first forum was held on June 29th; others followed throughout July and into early August. Two forums were held each week, on Thursday and Saturday. By having two forums in each region, it was hoped that as many youth as possible would be able to participate in the day-long event.

The format of the day consisted of a combination of small (4-6 participants) and large group sessions, which were facilitated by youth. Following a panel of speakers, participants were assigned to small groups and asked to identify the most important issues related to Canadian unity. From these issues, participants chose a single topic they wanted to discuss in more detail. Again in small groups, they were asked to identify the barriers to resolving the particular topic they were discussing. Later, the groups agreed on concrete recommendations to overcome these problems. At the end of the day, a representative from each small group presented their groups' recommendations to all forum participants, who had an opportunity to question or comment on the group presentations.

As a result of these forums the Youth Council was able to compile this report on behalf of the youth of British Columbia. The recommendations contained herein can be grouped according to the six key topics identified as the most important issues to be resolved if Canada is to remain united:

* Canadian identity
* Quebec's role in Canada
* Multiculturalism and racism
* Native issues
* Political process
* Canadian economic competitiveness

First, youth felt that steps such as singing "Oh Canada!", a Canadian studies component in a standardized educational system, and more exchange programs should be used to instil pride and knowledge about Canada in youth.

Second, recommendations relating to Quebec included the continuation of the official policy of bilingualism, as well as the promotion of learning other languages. Participants felt that Quebec should have the necessary powers to maintain its culture and language.

Third, multiculturalism was considered an integral component of the Canadian identity and, therefore, should be promoted through multicultural events and through courses in school. Special attention should be given to funding immigrant services, including English as a Second Language or French as a Second Language training, to enable new immigrants to assimilate into Canadian society.

Fourth, Native people should be recognized as one of the founding peoples in Canada. Participants supported Native people's desire for self-government and for swift settlement of land claims. In order to promote understanding and awareness of Native peoples, Native representatives should be involved in the development of educational materials about their history and culture to be used throughout the educational system.

Fifth, both federal and provincial governments should ensure that a process is established that allows the average Canadian greater direct involvement in the political process. People should be taught about the political process and given information about constitutional reform in everyday language. More free votes should take place to allow politicians to reflect the desires of their constituents, and not their political party.

Sixth, long-term economic goals to reduce Canada's dependence on primary industries should be established cooperatively between federal and provincial governments. Collaboration should also occur between schools and industry. The use of more cooperative education and career programs should ensure that we produce a skilled and competitive labour force.

Other topics that were identified include: communications and the role of the media, social programs, rural/urban disparities, and regionalism.

Education was consistently identified as a key to overcoming the barriers to unity. Whether Quebec separation, multiculturalism, communications, or the political process were being discussed, young people placed considerable importance on the role of the educational system in addressing these issues. They repeatedly mentioned the need for a common set of educational goals and resource materials

across Canada, especially with respect to the study of Canadian history, and physical and social geography. They constantly reiterated the need to make education "come alive" through exchanges, special events and visits by resource people.

Despite the variety of communities that were visited, surprisingly few differences in the kinds of issues and recommendations were identified by youth. Only two topics specific to particular regions were identified: concerns about the impact of cross-border shopping both economically and culturally, and the disparity between rural and urban communities.

The Council members, facilitators and staff members were pleased with the enthusiasm, optimism and insight participants of all ages brought to the forums. Despite the cynicism and negativity young British Columbians see around them every day, they still hold hope for our country and are confident our problems can be resolved. Their comments and recommendations demonstrate a willingness to build a new vision of Canada based on understanding and mutual respect. The youth who attended the forum demonstrated a strong love of Canada which was reflected in their discussions and recommendations, and a commitment to take personal action to keep Canada together.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The Government of British Columbia should recommend to the Council of Ministers of Education that a Canadian Studies curriculum be developed cooperatively by all provinces and territories of Canada and implemented throughout the country. To ensure that a variety of perspectives are presented, Native, Francophone, Anglophone, and minority groups should be included in the curriculum development team.

1.2 The Ministry of Education should require that "Oh, Canada!" be regularly sung in school, especially in school assemblies.

1.3 The Province of British Columbia should extend the In-Province Group Travel Assistance Program to include travel to other Canadian communities, especially in the case of exchange programs, and should encourage the development of similar programs in other provinces and territories.

1.4 The Province of British Columbia should encourage the Government of Canada to expand the "Open House Canada" program.

1.5 In cooperation with Ministries of Tourism in other provinces and territories, and tourism operators, the Ministry of Tourism should develop and publicize programs and incentives which encourage travel across Canada, especially low-cost travel for youth.

1.6 The Ministry of Tourism, in cooperation with other Ministries of Tourism, should develop youth travel guides which outline low-cost alternatives for travel in Canada.

1.7 The Government of British Columbia should encourage government ministries and Crown corporations to promote knowledge of Canadian heritage and a sense of pride in the country as an integral component of their advertising.

1.8 The Governments of British Columbia and Canada should negotiate with airline companies to use the points accumulated by Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and the Members of Parliament (MPs) to

create travel subsidies for youth groups visiting other parts of Canada for cultural exchanges.

1.9 Job exchanges should be promoted by the federal and provincial governments to allow working Canadians to develop a greater understanding of their country. A starting point would be exchanges within the federal and provincial public services.

2.1 The federal government should continue its policy of official bilingualism; provincial and municipal governments should retain the right to choose one or both official languages for their communications.

2.2 The Ministry of Education should develop, promote and support a greater number of language programs, especially in French, at the elementary and secondary level.

2.3 The federal government should be encouraged to negotiate with Quebec to ensure that the province has the necessary powers to protect the French language and culture, but not to the extent that the rights of minorities are jeopardized.

2.4 The Government of British Columbia should encourage its sister Province of Quebec to repeal the Sign Law.

2.5 Ordinary Canadians, both Anglophone and Francophone, should be given an opportunity to participate in the negotiation of a new Canadian Constitution, rather than leaving negotiations to provincial and federal politicians.

2.6 The media should be encouraged to play a larger role in ensuring there is exchange between the cultures in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

3.1 The Ministry of Education should require multicultural studies to be incorporated into the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum to promote tolerance and understanding of other cultures.

3.2 The Government of Canada should be encouraged to maintain a policy of multiculturalism, with first priority for funding to go to immigrant services (English As a Second Language or French as a Second Language, transitional programs and citizenship programs) and programs with a primary aim of sharing and promoting cultural heritage.

3.3 The Government of British Columbia should continue to negotiate with the federal government to ensure that it provides funding for immigrant services (especially English as a Second Language or French as a Second Language) commensurate with the level of immigration to British Columbia.

3.4 The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should ensure that cross-cultural communications training is incorporated into the education of police, health care professionals and social service professionals.

3.5 The Government of Canada should expand its advertising on the economic and social contributions of new Canadians.

4.1 The provincial and federal governments should commence negotiations with Native groups immediately to address land claims.

4.2 The Government of Canada should create an advisory body, with substantial Native representation, to plan and implement a strategy for abolition of the Indian Act and development of enabling legislation allowing Native self-government.

4.3 Schools with substantial Native enrolment should be encouraged to develop and teach Native languages and culture. Native groups should be involved in the development of resource materials for these programs.

4.4 The provincial and federal governments should be more responsive to Native issues, particularly social issues and poverty; social programs should be developed and run by Native people.

5.1 Both the federal and provincial governments should examine and implement processes which allow direct involvement by the public in decision-making.

5.2 All provincial and federal documents, intended for public distribution, should be prepared using everyday language.

5.3 At both federal and provincial government levels, the use of free votes should be expanded considerably to include not only matters of personal conscience, such as abortion and capital punishment, but also most bills in the House.

5.4 The Government of British Columbia should press the Government of Canada for an effective and elected Senate.

5.5 The Ministry of Education should ensure that students have a greater understanding of the political process, the Parliamentary system and current political parties. Schools should be encouraged to invite politicians at municipal, provincial and federal levels into the classroom to give a first-hand account of how the Canadian political system works.

6.1 The Governments of British Columbia and Canada should support the development and maintenance of cooperative education programs at secondary schools, colleges, institutes and universities.

6.2 The Ministry of Education should expand the development of career programs within secondary schools.

6.3 The Ministry of Education should ensure that the General Studies component of the Graduation Program includes an understanding of economic issues which affect all Canadians.

6.4 The federal and provincial governments should collaborate in developing long-term goals for an economically independent Canada, which is less reliant on primary industry, and which focuses economic development on high-technology fields which promise to be in high demand in the future.

6.5 Subsidies to business at the provincial and federal level should be targeted at businesses which further the long-term goals developed above.

7.1 The Ministry of Education should ensure that young people are taught to interpret messages they receive through media and to check the accuracy of these messages by consulting other sources, rather than simply accepting these messages at face value.

ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Although the forum organizers expected considerable regional differences in the issues identified by the youth, the same issues and themes came up consistently. In the majority of the 12 forums, Canadian identity, Quebec's role in Canada, multiculturalism and racism, Native issues, the political process and constitutional reform, and Canada's economic independence were among the top issues identified by the small groups in the Problems session. Ignorance of Canada's history, geography, regions, political process and current events was mentioned in seven of the forums as one of the most important issues to be addressed if Canada is to remain together. In other forums, ignorance was often identified as a barrier to finding solutions to the other issues. Other topics identified include: communications/media (4), regionalism (4), social programs (3), regional disparities and isolation (3), and environment (4). A brief summary of the topics will follow along with some specific barriers that the youth identified for each issue, solutions proposed by the youth participants and key recommendations.

CANADIAN IDENTITY

The youth were concerned there is a lack of Canadian identity and that we, as Canadians, tend to rely too heavily on defining ourselves in terms of who we are not (e.g. American) rather than forging an identity of our own. In part, this problem seemed to stem from a lack of knowledge about what makes us Canadian. We have limited knowledge about the geography or the various cultural groups in Canada.

A few groups that discussed this topic prepared a list of what makes Canadians "Canadian" or what they like about Canada. In trying to ascertain what Canadians have in common, they suggested we enjoy a high standard of living, that we value order, peace, reserve and security, we have a genuine sense of caring and compassion for humanity, and we respect differences between people. The majority of Canadians are immigrants to this country, although we or our ancestors arrived at different times; this contributes to a hardiness or pioneer spirit which can be found in Canadian society.

Another concern that was closely related to this topic was that of being overshadowed by the United States, especially culturally and economically. When

the youth were asked what made Canadians different from Americans they listed qualities such as: Canada is a bilingual country, we are known internationally as peacekeepers, we have ties to the Commonwealth and we look out to the world rather than taking an egocentric view. This exercise seemed to allow the youth to determine how pride in Canada can be instilled in future generations of Canadians.

A key barrier identified by participants was that Canadian history is not emphasized enough in school. The youth complained about knowing more European or American history than Canadian history. History is often taught in a very dry, uninteresting way that does not show the relevance of what is being studied to modern life.

Many other specific barriers were identified as hindering the growth of Canadian identity. First, the vast size of Canada makes it very expensive for people to travel and meet other Canadians. It was often mentioned that British Columbians find it cheaper and easier to travel to California and Hawaii than to visit Eastern Canada. Second, it seemed to the youth that the media often focuses on differences rather than commonalities among Canadians. News coverage often seems to pit one group of Canadians against another, such as the Francophones against the Anglophones, or the Natives against the non-Natives, or portray groups in a very stereotypic way. Third, the youth were concerned about the lack of strong political leadership in Canada. There was a feeling that strong political leaders could unite the people behind a common cause.

"Canada was conceived in 1867 and born in 1982- and from a mixed marriage; Canada is only nine years old ... and acting like it too!"

-speaker in Chilliwack

The youth concluded that we suffer from a lack of patriotism and a strong sense of our own Canadian identity simply because we are ignorant about what we have to be proud of. They felt what was needed was a stronger emphasis on Canadian history taught from a variety of perspectives: French, English, Native and immigrant. One example of the need for multiple perspectives was given by a youth at the Surrey forum. This youth chose one specific piece of historical information - the rebellion lead by Louis Riel. He spoke of Louis Riel portrayed as a hero in the Programme Cadre (Francophone) school he attended. When he went to a French

immersion school, the rebellion led by Riel was taught in a neutral manner. Finally, in the Anglophone public school he attended, Riel was portrayed as a traitor.

Recommendations by the youth were certainly not limited to history, but extended to a "Canadian Studies" theme which they felt should be incorporated into the primary and secondary curriculum. This theme would include Canadian authors, social and physical geography, political parties and process, and current events.

The youth felt this Canadian studies curriculum needs to be incorporated into a standardized educational system to ensure that youth across Canada would learn the same things. Resource materials to support the curriculum and to ensure that multiple perspectives are presented should be developed at a national level. The consensus was that if young people were more knowledgeable about their own country and learned the same things no matter where they lived in the country, a stronger Canadian identity would emerge. They felt the current system of allowing each province to develop its curriculum encouraged regionalism rather than nationalism.

The youth were concerned that "Oh, Canada!" is seldom sung at school or public events, and that the Canadian flag is not displayed prominently in classrooms and in the community. Canada Day, in many communities, is not celebrated with exuberance. While most young people have some hesitations about the unabashed nationalism of the United States of America, they felt that we should shed our reserve and celebrate being Canadian more often. Canada Day should be an occasion for fireworks and concerts featuring Canadian culture and music from across the country. The provinces and regions could be highlighted in these performances so that we, as Canadians, learn more about one another.

The general public also needs to learn more about other parts of the country and develop more pride in Canada. Businesses and public places should display the Canadian flag more prominently. Businesses could also help increase the knowledge of Canadian history by presenting vignettes of local or Canadian history in their television advertising. Crown corporations have an even greater responsibility to incorporate messages which support Canadian identity and pride in their advertising. Canada Post was singled out as having done an excellent job in recent advertisements featuring historical events (Heritage Minutes). Participants suggested that the promotions done by Petro-Canada (e.g. the torch relay, and the advertisement with the new youth immigrant noticing the similarity of the Petro-Canada logo to the Canadian flag) could and should be emulated by other advertisers.

"We should make July 1st as big as July 4th!"

-participant in Castlegar

One of the best ways for people to learn about the regions of Canada, other cultures and the other language is by seeing and experiencing it first hand. The youth suggested that more government and privately-sponsored exchange programs for people are needed. These exchange programs should not be limited to trips only to Quebec but should include trips to Native reserves and other parts of the country. In this way, youth will hopefully be more understanding and empathetic to the concerns of Canadians across the country. Exchange programs should involve both young people and older Canadians. Short term job exchanges should be encouraged by companies with operations in other parts of the country, and supported by unions, professional associations and the provincial and federal governments.

Participants also felt that Canadian unity can be achieved by promoting cheap travel passes (e.g. VIA Rail pass) for youth to travel and see the country. Travel passes, already available to youth from outside Canada, should be made available to young Canadians. Youth often do not know about the exchange and low-cost travel opportunities that already exist. For example, college and university residences are often available to travelers in the summer months. It was recommended that the B.C. Youth Council consider developing a brochure on these opportunities.

The youth felt that seeing one's own country was, in part, an individual responsibility, but that tourism organizations should develop and publicize incentives to make this travel affordable for all Canadians.

"Give all students a free or dirt cheap VIA Rail pass in order for them to see and learn what Canada is all about."

-participant in Vancouver

Another method of linking communities across Canada would be developing pen-pal programs. Many youth suggested that writing to pen pals could be an activity

done in school as an individual or a class, perhaps in conjunction with a project on that region of the country. The youth commented that we have twinning agreements that match communities here in Canada with others in the U.S.S.R. or Japan; perhaps we should consider twinning schools and communities across Canada.

The media could also play a role in developing a greater understanding of other Canadian regions. Coverage of other regions and peoples of Canada should be examined to ensure that it is balanced. The National Film Board should continue developing materials that can be used in the classroom or be broadcast to educate Canadians on the realities, concerns and aspirations of other parts of Canada. These materials should be more actively promoted and distributed.

Recommendations:

1.1 The Government of British Columbia should recommend to the Council of Ministers of Education that a Canadian Studies curriculum be developed cooperatively by all provinces and territories of Canada and implemented throughout the country. To ensure that a variety of perspectives are presented, Native, Francophone, Anglophone, and minority groups should be included in the curriculum development team.

1.2 The Ministry of Education should require that "Oh, Canada!" be regularly sung in school, especially in school assemblies.

1.3 The Province of British Columbia should extend the In-Province Group Travel Assistance Program to include travel to other Canadian communities, especially in the case of exchange programs, and should encourage the development of similar programs in other provinces and territories.

1.4 The Province of British Columbia should encourage the Government of Canada to expand the "Open House Canada" program.

1.5 In cooperation with Ministries of Tourism in other provinces and territories, and tourism operators, the Ministry of Tourism should develop and publicize programs and incentives which encourage travel across Canada, especially low-cost travel for youth.

1.6 The Ministry of Tourism, in cooperation with other Ministries of Tourism, should develop youth travel guides which outline low-cost alternatives for travel in Canada.

1.7 The Government of British Columbia should encourage government ministries and Crown corporations to promote knowledge of Canadian heritage and a sense of pride in the country as an integral component of their advertising.

1.8 The Governments of British Columbia and Canada should negotiate with airline companies to use the points accumulated by MLAs and the MPs to create travel subsidies for youth groups visiting other parts of Canada for cultural exchanges.

1.9 Job exchanges should be promoted by the federal and provincial governments to allow working Canadians to develop a greater understanding of their country. A starting point would be exchanges within the federal and provincial public services.

QUEBEC'S ROLE IN CANADA

Quebec was one of the most popular topics for discussion among the youth. As many young British Columbians have not had an opportunity to travel to Quebec, participants were concerned they did not really understand what Quebec wanted and why. A wide variety of barriers were identified, many of which stemmed from ignorance and misunderstandings on both sides. Most youth were torn between recognizing Quebec's fear of losing it's language and culture and yet not wanting to give Quebec too many special powers. They felt that provinces should be treated fairly and equitably, although they acknowledged that "fair does not always mean equal". The analogy of a child requiring special attention due to illness or accident was used. Parents may have to give that child some special care and attention, but that does not justify neglecting their other children completely. They were uncertain about what the Distinct Society Clause really entails and did not have a clear understanding of the Meech Lake Accord.

Generally, the youth were able to see the many facets of this complex issue. For example, there was a recognition that, on one hand, the historical grievances of Quebec have been left unresolved, causing many Quebequois to consider separation. On the other, they were able to understand the frustration and regret many Canadians feel regarding Quebec's potential separation.

Language barriers played a key role. First, the youth felt that, in Canada, language barriers have prevented the sharing of culture and thus understanding and tolerance. Second, it was acknowledged that not all Canadians support the continuation of the official bilingualism policy. Third, the youth felt that the Sign

Law in Quebec has only created further tensions between French and English Canadians.

Media coverage of Quebec was identified as another barrier to resolution of Quebec's role in Canada. Specifically, the youth felt the media in Quebec sensationalized events such as the incidents in Ontario where the Fleur-de-Lys was trampled and communities declared themselves unilingual. Likewise the media in the rest of Canada sensationalized the incident in Quebec where the Canadian flag was burned. Some participants felt the public, not the media, was at fault, because the media only responds to what the public demands in information. The public wants to have news which confirms their beliefs whether they are accurate or not.

Many youth spoke of their belief that we are not hearing what the ordinary people of Quebec think about separation. They questioned whether people in Quebec know of the attitudes of other Canadians toward their language, culture and province. They felt that people throughout Canada are unaware of the economic and social costs of separating.

"If Quebec were to separate, it will be because the majority has not spoken yet."

- speaker in Kelowna

In trying to generate solutions to these problems, the youth concluded that in general there was a distinct difference between their attitudes about Quebec and bilingualism and those held by older generations of Canadians. The youth perceived themselves to be much more open to bilingualism and to Quebec in general. They did not want Quebec to separate (though they felt that if Quebec chose to do this, their decision must be respected) because they considered it an integral part of Canada's identity. They felt the United States of America would be a threat to Canadian independence if our country were fragmented. They worried about the ability of the Maritimes to survive if it was separated from the rest of Canada by an independent Quebec. If Quebec were to separate, they felt that it should take with it a reasonable share of the nation's assets and liabilities (e.g. pension funds and properties, national debt).

Many recommendations revolved around the language issue. The youth accepted the policy of official bilingualism and felt that it was important that services

continue in both languages in federal government offices. However, they also thought Canada should promote more unofficial forms of bilingualism such as learning one another's language and culture. They viewed the learning of French and other languages as an asset, even though they acknowledged they were sometimes frustrated by the difficulty of learning French in high school.

They felt that learning French from kindergarten on would make it easier to learn, and that it would be an unquestioned part of their schooling, just as mathematics or science are. While many of the youth supported the idea that French become a compulsory subject from Kindergarten through grade 12 in English Canada, they recognized this might offend many older Canadians. Instead, they suggested that students should be strongly encouraged to learn about French language and culture. This would not necessarily mean only French Immersion programs, but also French as a Second Language. There should, however, be some flexibility in terms of learning other languages. For example, learning a Native language or an Asian language may be more appropriate in some communities in British Columbia.

Generally, the youth were in favour of giving Quebec enough power to ensure that it's language and culture were preserved, but any powers beyond that were not acceptable. Specifically, they felt very strongly that the Sign Law in Quebec should be repealed immediately and that similar laws which infringe on other group's rights should be disallowed.

They were unconvinced that provincial politicians truly reflected the views of ordinary Canadians, both Anglophone and Francophone, regarding Quebec issues and other issues related to National Unity. They were, therefore, highly suspicious of a constitutional reform process that gave politicians sole decision-making powers.

Finally, the youth willingly acknowledged a lack of awareness of "historical fact", the role that Quebec has played in the history of Canada. The development of a common Canadian studies curriculum with a variety of perspectives was seen to address this issue with children and youth.

However, people of all ages need to learn about one another's cultures. At one forum, the youth suggested French programs be broadcast on English television with the addition of subtitles and vice versa in Quebec. In this way, the youth felt that if we knew more about each other, we would have a greater sense of a common identity and would be less likely to want to separate. The promotion of exchange programs and travel to Quebec were also suggested as a means of experiencing the French culture first hand.

> **"We should not think about what Quebec wants, but rather why they want what they want."**
>
> *-participant in Kelowna*

Recommendations:

2.1 The federal government should continue its policy of official bilingualism; provincial and municipal governments should retain the right to choose one or both official languages for their communications.

2.2 The Ministry of Education should develop, promote and support a greater number of language programs, especially in French, at the elementary and secondary level.

2.3 The federal government should be encouraged to negotiate with Quebec to ensure that the province has the necessary powers to protect the French language and culture, but not to the extent that the rights of minorities are jeopardized.

2.4 The Government of British Columbia should encourage its sister Province of Quebec to repeal the Sign Law.

2.5 Ordinary Canadians, both Anglophone and Francophone, should be given an opportunity to participate in the negotiation of a new Canadian Constitution, rather than leaving negotiations to provincial and federal politicians.

2.6 The media should be encouraged to play a larger role in ensuring there is exchange between the cultures in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

MULTICULTURALISM AND RACISM

Although the youth were readily able to identify various problems related to this topic, the general feeling was that they took pride in Canadian multiculturalism. Respect and tolerance of other cultures was often identified as one of the key

ingredients of Canadian identity, although we do not always live up to this ideal. As a result, the youth often linked multiculturalism with the problem of racism.

Racism was a predominant theme throughout many discussions on this topic. The most evident barrier noted was that of ignorance about the various cultures found in Canadian society. Another was the perception that new immigrants do not want to be Canadian. The youth concluded that perhaps the reason areas such as Chinatowns emerged was not because these groups did not want to become "Canadian", but rather was a result of discrimination that these groups had encountered. Many people do not understand the "culture shock" in moving to a new country until they have themselves experienced immersion in a foreign culture. In addition, there is a low tolerance of other cultures and a lack of recognition that we are all "ethnic", that is, we all have our own ethnic backgrounds and traditions.

The youth suggested people often use the label of "tradition" to justify racist behaviour such as scapegoating of visible minority groups, stereotyping and the use of racist jokes when they feel threatened and/or unwilling to change. For example, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer who wanted to wear his turban (a requirement of the Sikh religion) instead of the traditional hat. While some youth were concerned about altering one of the few Canadian symbols, most felt that it did not infringe on tradition in any meaningful way. In fact, one youth pointed out that no one complains about female RCMP officers wearing a hat different than that worn by males. The youth felt that tolerance, understanding and a willingness to compromise would go a long way to addressing these problems.

Today, Canada is no longer a society of individuals mainly from European descent: the new demographic reality is that increasing numbers of Canadians have a non-European heritage. Generally, the youth felt they were more willing to accept this fact than were older generations. They perceived the diversity of Canada's people as an asset, both culturally and economically. The increase in racial problems, which they perceive to be the result of this change, has occurred without the necessary awareness and education for both new immigrants and Native Canadians. Accordingly, there is an even greater need for a policy of multiculturalism which promotes the tolerance and acceptance of various cultures.

Recommendations for overcoming many barriers related to this topic focused on education. To eradicate problems that stem from racism, the key is to teach children at a very young age about various cultural groups. To achieve this would include holding multiculturalism days at school, using *United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (March 21, 1992) as an opportunity to hold seminars on discrimination, celebrating various ethnic holidays, and learning from history how various ethnic groups have contributed to Canadian society. The youth also suggested having a course on multiculturalism, like Multiculturalism 11,

as a mandatory part of the school curriculum. This course would be dedicated to teaching people about the various cultural groups which make up the Canadian mosaic and impart information about different cultural and religious beliefs.

Courses in cross-cultural communication should be made mandatory for police, teachers, health care professionals and social service professionals.

Others felt this kind of knowledge could be best acquired through more active learning strategies such as exchange programs to different parts of Canada (including Native reserves and Northern communities), and to other parts of the world. Exchange programs should not be limited to students; job exchanges within Canada and outside could provide opportunities for older Canadians to enhance their understanding of other cultures. Realizing that exchange programs are often expensive and are not always feasible for all students, some youth suggested resource people from various ethnic groups within their community be brought into the classroom.

In summary, most participants agreed that learning to be tolerant and understanding of other people and cultures cannot be learned from books; it is necessary to personalize the experience. Once a person has met and spoken with others about their cultural and religious beliefs, he/she is more likely to use that knowledge in their daily lives than if the information had merely been read in a book.

Cultural groups also have a responsibility to share their culture with others. Multicultural funding should be directed toward those groups that have an outward focus, rather than on supporting groups that merely want to preserve their culture for their own enjoyment. Individuals also have a responsibility for greater understanding and tolerance. Participants in several forums emphasized that each person must make a personal effort to communicate with and understand others.

"Step into the shoes of others and challenge the stereotypes which have lead to many of the problems we are currently facing"

-speaker in Cranbrook

Although the youth were generally very positive about the policy of multiculturalism, concerns were expressed about the problem of new Canadians not integrating into Canadian society. Some felt that perhaps the policy of multiculturalism, which encourages people to keep their culture and heritage, may hinder new Canadians from learning about and integrating into their new society. However, most of the youth placed the blame on insufficient availability of English as a Second Language or French as a Second Language programs, and programs or services which help immigrants adjust to and function in Canadian society.

While it is important for people to keep and share their own unique cultural heritage, the youth felt strongly that new immigrants should become Canadians. Most believe that immigrants have come to Canada because they chose to be Canadian. Specifically, the youth recommended that a first priority on funding for multiculturalism be given to immigrant services that help ensure that new Canadians are able to: speak one official language, participate in the community, and assume their responsibilities as citizens of Canada.

Until new immigrants have adapted to Canadian society, information on essential government services and programs should be made available in their mother tongue. The resource materials on literacy, which are available through public libraries, should be promoted, especially through cultural channels on television. Transitional services provided by cultural centres, which aid the new immigrant in adapting to Canadian culture (e.g. for young Indo-Canadian women who are being asked by their families to accept arranged marriages), should be supported by government.

The federal government also has a responsibility to new immigrants to ensure that Canadians understand the facts about the contributions of new Canadians. Some participants felt that many Canadians falsely believe that immigrants are a drain on our taxes, or are frequently involved with youth gangs or other criminal behavior.

"We want a melting pot with lukewarm water that doesn't boil the culture out of the people"

-participant in Chilliwack

Recommendations:

3.1 The Ministry of Education should require multicultural studies to be incorporated into the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum to promote tolerance and understanding of other cultures.

3.2 The Government of Canada should be encouraged to maintain a policy of multiculturalism, with first priority for funding to go to immigrant services (English as a Second Language or French as a Second Language, transitional programs and citizenship programs) and programs with a primary aim of sharing and promoting cultural heritage.

3.3 The Government of British Columbia should continue to negotiate with the federal government to ensure that it provides funding for immigrant services (especially English as a Second Language or French as a Second Language) commensurate with the level of immigration to British Columbia.

3.4 The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should ensure that cross-cultural communications training is incorporated into the education of police, health care professionals and social service professionals.

3.5 The Government of Canada should expand its advertising on the economic and social contributions of new Canadians.

FIRST NATIONS ISSUES

First Nations issues emerged as a major contributor to disunity. The discussions focused on: self-government, Native land claims, aboriginal rights, and racism and prejudice. Although in one forum, a predominantly Native youth group discussed this topic, there was very little difference in the barriers and recommendations that they identified compared to the ones identified by non-Native youth groups who also discussed the topic.

A few key barriers emerged repeatedly across all groups that tackled this topic for discussion. First, the youth identified the general lack of knowledge most Canadians have about the Native peoples' history and longstanding land claims. The youth blamed governments' delays in negotiating land claim settlements for recent tensions (e.g. the incident in Oka, Quebec, and the road blockades in British Columbia).

Many participants, both Native and non-Native, raised the issue of the historic injustices toward Native people. An example referred to at several forums was mistreatment and abuse of Native youth in residential schools. These injustices have contributed to the social and economic problems in many Native communities. The youth were concerned that these injustices offend Canadians' sense of social justice and fair play, which are an integral component of Canadian identity. By not addressing these injustices, federal and provincial governments are creating a potential powderkeg.

Closely related to this is the problem of racism, prejudice and stereotyping of Native people. Native people are often portrayed as alcoholics and panhandlers. These negative images are perpetuated by media coverage. The Native youth in Terrace pointed out that often when the media is covering Native issues they tend to focus on the alcohol and drug problems in a community rather than any of the positive things that may be going on. Also, in reporting information about land claims settlements, only the incidents which are conflictual are covered. This group of youth felt it was unfortunate that more media coverage was not given to the groups, like the Nisga'a, which are currently in the process of settling their land claims without confrontation and litigation. Similar points were made in other forums.

The youth identified two specific concerns related to Native culture. First, they were concerned about the loss of Native culture; many Native adults do not speak their ancestral language as a result of having been removed to residential schools. Young Native students are only just beginning to learn their languages in school. Second, non-Native Canadians, youth and adults, lack knowledge about the role of Native culture and history in the heritage of Canada.

"To be unified does not mean to be uniform, instead it means we have a common dream."

-speaker in Cranbrook

The most frequent recommendations put forward by the youth were regarding: Native land claims, Native self government, and the Indian Act and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. First, the youth felt the federal government has put off the settlement of land claims for too long. The general public needs to be educated about what the claims are. Local Native leaders should

plan information sessions for the general public which address the Native claims and also present Native culture and traditions. All affected parties should be involved in the negotiations, which must take place in the local area, not in Victoria or Ottawa.

Second, the youth were very supportive of Native self-government. Native youth in Terrace cautioned, however, that some Native bands are not ready for self-government and that education and assistance must be available to bands during a transitional time. Native groups should have greater involvement in policing, education, and social services for their people. They felt that Native elders should assist judges in determining appropriate sentences for Native offenders.

Third, participants recommend that the Indian Act be abolished and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs disbanded. In its place a new agency should be established, ensuring that Native peoples not only have a say in how it is organized but are actively involved in the everyday decision making.

The youth felt that Natives were not adequately represented in government. They recommended that Native leaders be invited to participate in First Ministers' conferences, and there be greater participation by Natives on governmental committees.

Education was viewed by the participants as being a valuable tool to enlighten non-Natives about Native culture and history. To ensure that this is done properly, participants suggested that Native people should be involved in the development of curriculum. More Native teachers should be trained, and Native leaders could be brought into classrooms as a valuable resource. In general, the youth agreed that Native studies should become part of the education curriculum. By incorporating a component of Native studies in school and creating more opportunities for interaction between Natives and non-Natives, the youth were optimistic that relations would improve.

A number of recommendations were offered concerning one-sided media coverage given to Native people. More Native role models were suggested as a way to help dismiss the negative stereotypes and to help foster pride in the Native community. Another recommendation was an educational or awareness campaign. This campaign would include a "First People's Week", which would involve a celebration of the history and culture of the many Native peoples across Canada. One group suggested having the Chiefs and councils organize information sessions on Native culture and traditions, and establishing Native media for both Native and non-Natives.

Recommendations:

- **4.1 The provincial and federal governments should commence negotiations with Native groups immediately to address land claims.**

- **4.2 The Government of Canada should create an advisory body, with substantial Native representation, to plan and implement a strategy for abolition of the Indian Act and development of enabling legislation allowing Native self-government.**

- **4.3 Schools with substantial Native enrolment should be encouraged to develop and teach Native languages and culture. Native groups should be involved in the development of resource materials for these programs.**

- **4.4 The provincial and federal governments should be more responsive to Native issues, particularly social issues and poverty; social programs should be developed and run by Native people.**

POLITICAL PROCESS/POWER STRUCTURE

The concerns of the youth focused primarily on three major areas: the need for reform of many existing political institutions, the general lack of education about the Canadian political system, and the lack of avenues by which the average person can become involved in the decision-making process.

The youth identified Canadians' general lack of knowledge of our political system, the Constitution, and the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments as a fundamental problem. For example, few people are aware that some provinces were not treated equally in the process of confederation. It was suggested that because people do not have a clear understanding of the political system, they are unaware of how they can become involved, and thus feel powerless to change the problems around them. In particular, the youth at a number of forums identified their own limited ability to participate in the decision-making process as a real problem.

As do most Canadians, the youth agree that the last round of constitutional talks was not an acceptable way to determine the future of the country. They felt the process had eroded their trust in politicians and in the political system. They questioned whether politicians really echo the opinions of the ordinary Canadian and, therefore, recommended more grassroots involvement in the setting of the political agenda.

Other issues raised during discussions of this topic include: the lack of vision for Canada, the inadequate political representation of rural regions, and whether Royal assent is still required. At only one forum was the role of the Queen questioned. They wondered why laws made in Canada required Royal assent, when Canada is a separate nation and many citizens have no links with the British tradition or the Commonwealth. The youth proposed the position of the Governor General should continue, but he/she be elected by the Canadian people rather than be appointed by the Queen.

Various recommendations were given for dealing with problems identified. First, the youth felt the Senate should be elected and representative of the various regions of Canada. They did not express any strong views as to whether the representation should be equal for all provinces.

Second, to address the lack of effective public consultation especially on constitutional matters, a number of suggestions were considered. The youth felt information about the Constitution, the Meech Lake Accord and other constitutional issues should be given to the public in everyday language . Constituent assemblies and more referendums were suggested to ensure that ordinary Canadians have a say in these issues. People are tired of the current consultation processes which often do not result in any government action. At the same time, some participants questioned whether the public will take a long-term view when responding to an issue, or whether people will take the time to become well-informed.

"Consulting is not enough ... we need consultation with substance!"

-speaker in Surrey

Concern was expressed about the representation of Native people and minority groups in the House of Commons. At the Vancouver forum, participants recommended that Native peoples be given direct representation in the House. However, while similar concerns were raised at other forums, participants hesitated to recommend any process of designating specific seats for minority groups.

The youth were concerned that the individual MLA or MP was not able to adequately represent his constituency when he or she was required to vote along

party lines. Politicians should be allowed to use free votes more often, especially when the issue pertains to their constituency.

Third, to enable Canadians to participate more fully in the politics, an emphasis should be placed on teaching youth about the political parties and process in Canada. Many of the youth felt that politicians such as mayors, MLAs and MPs should be used as a community resource and brought into schools to give a first hand account of how the Canadian political system functions.

As the next generation of Canadians, the youth felt very strongly about the need to establish avenues for their own involvement in the decisions being made about Canada's future. One speaker reminded the youth that even though young people may not be eligible to vote, politicians have a responsibility to all the members of their constituency, not just those of voting age. In addition, the youth tried to establish other ways to ensure their involvement. Youth ambassadors and a national Youth Council were both suggested as ways to establish a dialogue between Canadian youth and the government. Also, one group suggested having a youth MP whose sole task would be to represent the views and concerns of Canadian youth and ensure that the opinions of tomorrow's decision makers are heard.

"We can think of Canada like a quilt with all these different pieces, and we as youth can be the threads that bind the quilt together."

-speaker in Kelowna

To help resolve the problem of limited access to politicians, especially MPs, the youth commented on how technology should be used to link up individual Canadians and groups of Canadians across the country. For example, one group felt that videophones could be used to allow constituents to meet with their MP, who often spends many months of the year in Ottawa. One speaker noted that the recent changes to the schedule of when the House of Commons sits should allow MPs to spend more time in their constituency on a regular basis, thereby addressing the isolation felt by people in their ridings.

Recommendations:

5.1 Both the federal and provincial governments should examine and implement processes which allow direct involvement by the public in decision making.

5.2 All provincial and federal documents, intended for public distribution, should be prepared using everyday language.

5.3 At both federal and provincial government levels, the use of free votes should be expanded considerably to include not only matters of personal conscience, such as abortion and capital punishment, but also most bills in the House.

5.4 The Government of British Columbia should press the Government of Canada for an effective and elected Senate.

5.5 The Ministry of Education should ensure that students have a greater understanding of the political process, the Parliamentary system, and current political parties. Schools should be encouraged to invite politicians at municipal, provincial and federal levels into the classroom to give a first-hand account of how the Canadian political system works.

CANADIAN ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Although it might seem that a topic on the Canadian economy would be of little interest to youth, participants were genuinely concerned about Canada's ability to compete economically in the future. These concerns can be grouped into three categories: the need for long-term planning, the need to educate the public, and taxation. First, the youth felt that governments often plan only from election to election rather than taking a look at the long-term needs of the Canadian economy. Thus, many youth identified a lack of economic goals and focus as one of the major issues facing Canada today.

Furthermore, it was felt that the Canadian economy is much too dependent on primary industries which do not generate nearly as many jobs or as much revenue as secondary manufacturing. This problem was seen as extremely acute in many towns in British Columbia where entire communities are dependent upon one or two industries and employers.

Second, many of the youth suggested there is a general lack of knowledge among the Canadian people about Canadian economic agreements and how everyone's actions affect the economy. Specifically, many of the youth admitted they did not fully understand the terms of the Free Trade agreement. In addition, at many locations including Victoria, Castlegar, Chilliwack and Kelowna, the problem of cross-border shopping emerged as a key concern. Shopping in the United States was not only linked to economic problems such as bankruptcies of Canadian merchants and reduced funding available for social programs (due to taxes not being paid on purchases made outside Canada), but also to the problem of maintaining a unique Canadian identity.

Third, increasing national debt and heavy taxation lead the youth to conclude that the government has been irresponsible in its money management. They felt the government should seek out new sources of revenue, because higher levels of taxation will only further disgruntle Canadians.

"The Americans don't have to send in their armies ... they have Free Trade."

-participant in Castlegar

The youth who discussed this topic realized that Canada's ability to compete economically in the world market will directly affect the standard of living that future generations of Canadians will be able to enjoy. In order to ensure that Canada has a strong and prosperous future, the youth recommended that national economic goals and objectives be established. Once these have been created, they felt that Canadians should focus their energy on the things we do extremely well, such as information technology. It is also imperative that new markets be explored rather than relying on the United States as our major market. At one forum, the youth felt that Canadians should focus on becoming a world leader in environmental technology. Only those businesses which will be competitive in a global market and show a long-term potential should receive subsidies.

While trying to create a more prosperous and efficient economy, the youth were adamant that the quality of our social programs should not be compromised. Given the current demographic trend of an aging population, they recognized the national debt must be curtailed if social programs are to be maintained. They

suggested that programs be examined to eliminate unnecessary expenditures and make them more efficient.

Education was deemed necessary at two levels. First, the youth felt that Canadians need to be educated about the ramifications of spending outside of Canada and the pros and cons of the Free Trade agreement. Moreover, some youth suggested that the Free Trade agreement be re-negotiated to ensure that Canada is really getting a fair deal.

Second, the youth felt we should have a highly skilled and productive labour force if we want to compete in the global market. This training could, they suggested, be acquired through a variety of avenues beyond the traditional school curriculum. For example, many participants recommended that more interaction between school and the work place be established via cooperative education programs. Also, it was suggested that more volunteer experiences should be made available to allow youth to gain valuable job skills.

To tackle the massive national debt that Canada has accrued, the youth felt strongly that the revenues that have been generated from the GST should be used towards debt reduction. Although the youth did not come up with any concrete suggestions for raising revenues, they felt that the heavy tax burden could be lessened if the government was forced to be more responsible with its spending. Some youth suggested that the government look back to past governments who have managed the money successfully as an example. They also recommended that a commission, or body of private citizens, be formed to review the budget of governments.

Recommendations:

6.1 The Governments of British Columbia and Canada should support the development and maintenance of cooperative education programs at secondary schools, colleges, institutes and universities.

6.2 The Ministry of Education should expand the development of career programs within secondary schools.

6.3 The Ministry of Education should ensure that the General Studies component of the Graduation Program includes an understanding of economic issues which affect all Canadians.

6.4 The federal and provincial governments should collaborate in developing long-term goals for an economically independent Canada,

which is less reliant on primary industry, and which focuses economic development on high-technology fields which promise to be in high demand in the future.

6.5 Subsidies to business at the provincial and federal level should be targeted at businesses which further the long-term goals developed above.

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE MEDIA

Communications and the media came up repeatedly in the forums, although it was often listed as a barrier to solving a key issue than an issue in itself. Participants felt the media tends to report only negative and sensationalized stories rather than focusing on the positive steps being made to resolve problems. Thus, the actions of a few people are covered in great detail, creating the impression that the majority of people in that region or group share those same views. Examples of this are given in the sections on Quebec's Role in Canada and First Nations Issues.

The youth feared the general public's reliance on "30-second" clips of key issues was very destructive. These clips do not cover issues in enough depth to gain any real insight or form an informed opinion, yet often are used as the basis for decision making. In addition, people are unaware of the intrinsic biases that the media hold.

Participants discussed the possibility of regulating media coverage since they felt the media has an obligation to educate the people. Although most agreed the media is not fulfilling this obligation of reporting impartially, there was a concern that enforced regulation would be seen as an infringement on the freedom of speech. Furthermore, many felt to a certain extent the public is partly responsible for this sensational kind of reporting - if people were truly unhappy with it, they would voice their concerns by "changing the channel". Instead it was suggested the media could establish a self-regulatory code of ethics to use as guidelines for reporting.

In addition, greater use of public service announcements was suggested to promote multiculturalism and combat racism. Schools should be teaching students to be more critical viewers, readers or listeners of the media, and expand the number and variety of means by which they obtain information.

Second, the communications part of this topic encompassed concerns about how the vast size of the country makes it difficult to get to know other Canadians and experience the issues first hand. A number of suggestions were offered as possible ways of uniting the country. The youth felt we should all learn to communicate and

listen to one another, because only through open and effective communications will we ever be able to resolve our problems. Consequently, they recommended that people be encouraged to learn as many languages as they can. Another suggestion was to place more of an emphasis on teaching people how to listen and communicate effectively in schools. Some youth proposed that modems and other kinds of technological communications should be used to allow Canadians from various parts of the country to meet and talk about the issues concerning them.

> **"Communication is the key to solving our present problem on identity and unity and everyone must be involved in the process."**
>
> *-participant in Surrey*

Recommendation:

7.1 The Ministry of Education should ensure that young people are taught to interpret messages they receive through media and to check the accuracy of these messages by consulting other sources, rather than simply accepting these messages at face value.

OTHER TOPICS

Social Programs, the environment and regionalism were the three other topics discussed at the forums. Upon closer examination of the barriers identified in these discussions, it is apparent that these issues came up in many other topics previously outlined.

The Social Programs topic discussion encompassed a number of concerns, focusing on those issues which affect youth. Specifically, the group highlighted concerns about: gender barriers; access to education for all Canadian youth; illiteracy and the drop-out rate; youth representation; and a concern about a school curriculum that does not emphasize the teaching of contemporary Canadian issues and the political system. They felt that unequal distribution of social programs in different parts of Canada seriously hinders the unity of the country.

Human rights, equality and social justice were other things that the youth identified as being an integral part of Canada. Moreover, they felt that we can take pride in these values as being a fundamental component of our identity.

The youth tied the issue of the environment to National Unity in a number of ways. Often, the issue is presented as a conflict between environment and jobs which naturally tends to divide people in communities on either side. Governments often appear to be pitted against one another on environmental issues. This polarization of communities and governments creates disunity. They felt that more cooperation is needed between various governments on issues of the environment, because of the implications of the environmental problems for our entire nation, and because the issues often affect several adjacent provinces. The youth felt that it will take all of us working together to solve these problems.

Regionalism was another issue that was raised by the youth. They felt that often Canadians do not think nationally, but rather take more pride in their province or region. It was suggested that to a certain extent politicians encouraged this because of their unwillingness to forfeit power. This "grab" for power by the various provinces has, the youth suggested, led provinces to be pitted against one another as they vie for more money or contracts from the federal government. To combat these kinds of problems, it was suggested that people should remember above all we are Canadians.

"Even though we can only work on National Unity on a local level we have to think about it on a national level."

-speaker in Prince George

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Although the forums were held in communities of varying size all over the province, there were surprisingly few differences in the topics raised for discussion or the recommendations proposed. Two regional differences did emerge though: cross-border shopping and rural/urban disparities.

In Chilliwack, Castlegar, Kelowna and Victoria, the problem of cross-border shopping was of real concern. This can perhaps be attributed to the close proximity of these communities to the United States border. For these groups, cross-border shopping seemed to symbolize the problems identified in the topic "Canadian identity" which included lack of patriotism, and being overshadowed by the United States of America both culturally and economically. Consequently, these youth felt very strongly about the need to educate the public about the long-term effects of cross-border shopping, both on the Canadian economy and identity.

Disparities between rural and urban areas of Canada were discussed in Cranbrook, Terrace, Kelowna and Surrey. It was agreed that people from rural communities suffer from a lack of access to health care facilities, lack of educational and career opportunities, and lack of political representation. Although the youth recognized that more health care facilities in remote areas are not economically feasible, training of health care workers in Northern communities could be established. In addition, physicians could be required to serve part of their internships in a rural community. A number of young people complained that companies with contracts in their area often bring in work crews from outside. Giving preference to people who live in the area when contracts are let was suggested in the Terrace forum as a way of addressing this concern. Representation by area rather than by population was suggested as a way of improving political representation in more isolated areas. Participants felt that better political representation would lead to more economic development.

It was heartening to see that the rural/urban disparities topic was discussed in urban areas such as Surrey and Kelowna. These discussions suggest that youth from these areas are sensitive and knowledgeable about concerns of people from other areas of the province. In Kelowna, a participant suggested that coming from rural areas should not always be considered a disadvantage; the benefits of living in smaller communities include less pollution, less crime and lower housing prices.

WHO WERE THE PARTICIPANTS?

Upon the recommendations of the Steering Committee, the organizers of the forum agreed not to restrict attendance to those between 15 and 24 years of age, even though this group was the target audience. It was hoped that a wide spectrum of youth would be in attendance as a result of the advertising and promotion of the forums. In order to establish a profile of the participants, the following information was gathered: age, gender, address, and whether they were employed or a student.

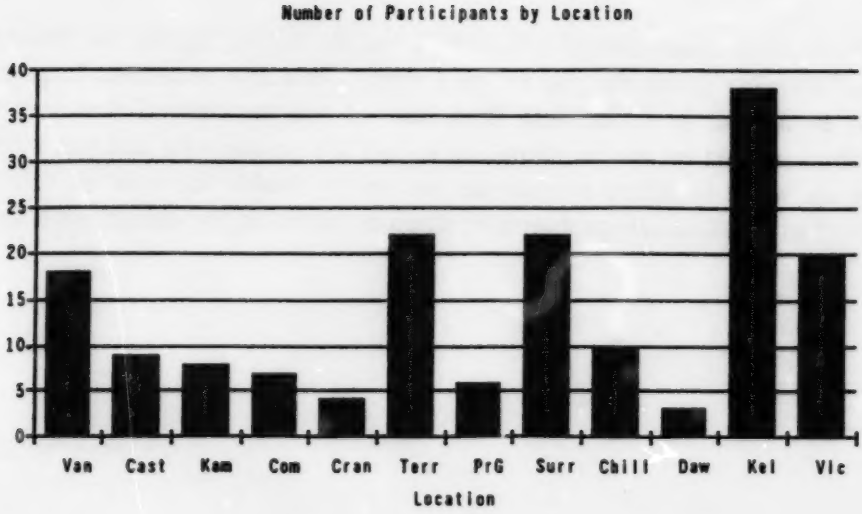
ATTENDANCE

During the planning phase, it was anticipated that between 20 and 100 youth would be in attendance at the various forums, with higher attendance in the metropolitan areas. After the first forum in Vancouver it became apparent that summer vacations were going to have a greater impact on attendance than was previously anticipated. The total attendance for all 12 forums was 167 participants. The highest attendance at the forums was 38 participants, and the lowest, three participants.

There were numerous problems with people registering for the forums but simply not showing up on the day of the forum. On a few occasions, large groups promised to attend; however, less than half of the anticipated numbers would actually show up. At certain locations, up to half the people who had registered did not show up, while in others attendance was nearly double the number registered. This proved to be extremely problematic when determining the assignments to small groups.

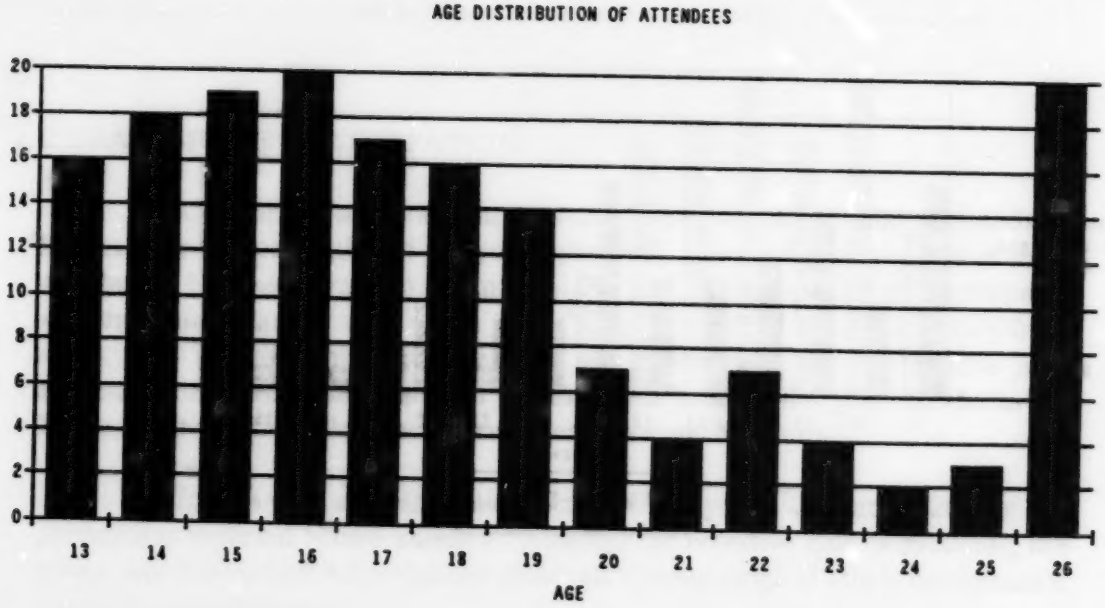
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY LOCATION

	ATTENDEES	NO SHOWS
VANCOUVER	18	15
CASTLEGAR	9	3
KAMLOOPS	8	0
COMOX	7	1
CRANBROOK	4	2
TERRACE	22	0
PRINCE GEORGE	6	0
SURREY	22	30
CHILLIWACK	10	3
DAWSON CREEK	3	0
KELOWNA	38	3
VICTORIA	20	5



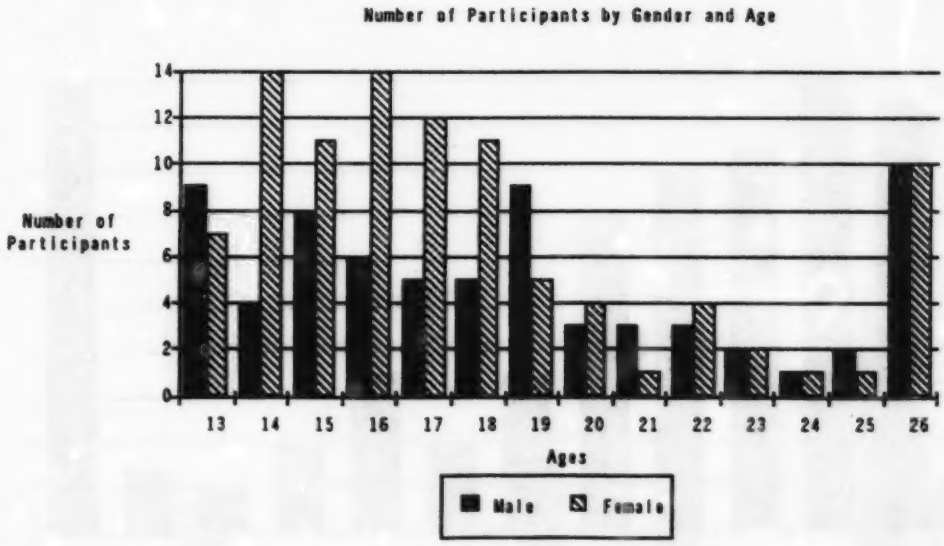
AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

Although advertising for the forums was targeted at youth between 15 and 24 years old, no one older or younger was excluded from participating. Accordingly, there was quite a range in the ages of participants: the youngest participant was 12 years old, and the oldest, 60. Eighty-six per cent of the participants were 24 years or less; 65% were in the 15 to 24 year-old age group. The single largest group attending the forums was 16 year-olds. Individuals who were 12, 17, and those over 26 years comprised the second largest groups in attendance. In fact, the impact of the group of people over the age of 26 years (11%) caused the average age to be 19 years, although the median age was only 17 years.



GENDER REPRESENTATION

Gender representation at the forums varied from location to location. At one location the participants were almost all male. At another, all participants were female, and at other forums, there was equal representation of both males and females. In total, however, males accounted for 41.9% of the participants and females for 58.1%. In general, female participants were clustered in the 14 to 17 year-old age group, whereas the male participants were relatively evenly distributed over the age scale, with higher attendance in the 13, 19 and 26 years and over age category.



STUDENT OR EMPLOYED?

The advertising for the forums was successful in attracting youth between 15 and 24 years of age. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority (81.3%) of participants were students and the remaining 18.7% were employed. Of those participants who were employed, most were in the 26 years and over age category. This older group was mainly comprised of youth leaders who accompanied their groups to the forums.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PARTICIPANTS	
* STUDENTS:	81.3%
* EMPLOYED:	18.7%

RURAL/URBAN PARTICIPATION

The Council was also concerned whether the young people who attended the forums were representative of the youth population as a whole, in terms of their distribution between rural and urban areas. While the majority of the participants were from urban areas, there was a rather large group from the Nass Valley, from towns such as Gitwnksihlkw, Greenville and New Aiyansh. The forums also attracted youth from other smaller communities around the province including Moyie, Fruitvale, Darfield, Black Creek, Keremeos and McClure.

The forums were successful in attracting Native youth. Just under 20% of the participants reported Native ancestry. Although no objective data is available, the forum coordinator and Administrator observed a broad range of ethnic backgrounds among forum participants.

PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

An integral part of carrying out any event is to gather feedback from the participants about the strengths and weaknesses of the process used. Each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire included in his/her forum kit. Ten to fifteen minutes was designated near the end of the day to complete these forms. Of the 167 participants who attended the forums, 128 completed the evaluation form. The evaluation was divided into seven questions which resulted in the following comments and information from the participants.

1. What were the major strengths/weaknesses of the structure of the forum?

Participants cited a wide variety of things they enjoyed at the forums. Many felt the panel of guest speakers and the following question-and-answer period was one of the best components of the day's activities. This session allowed the youth to gain a new perspective on the issues and challenged them to examine what they thought about the issues. There were also many compliments about the organization of the day's activities, and specifically, the timing of the sessions and breaks. The process used was often cited as an excellent way to organize this kind of discussion among youth. An overwhelming majority of participants commented they really enjoyed using the small group format. Many mentioned they felt they had learned a lot from simply having an opportunity to share their ideas with other youth.

"It was very educational and fun at the same time!"
-participant in Surrey

The two weakness that were consistently identified by participants were: the poor attendance rates, and the need to address the perceived lack of advertising and

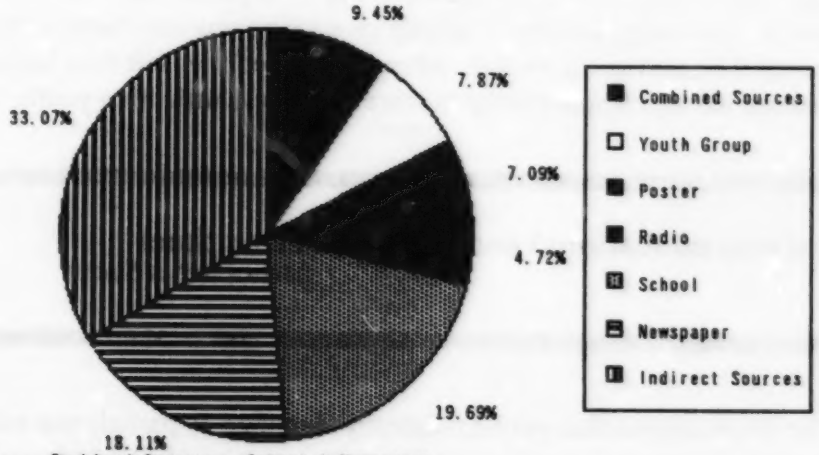
publicity about the forums. While the youth generally were very positive about their experience at the forum, they felt that a higher attendance would have made the day even better.

2. How did you find out about the forums?

Of the 127 participants who completed this question, approximately 33% found out about the forums through personal contacts such as a friend, council member or a direct phone call. Schools were the next best source for youth to learn about the forums, drawing 20% of the attendees. Newspaper advertising was a close third, attracting 18% of the youth who participated in the forums. Some participants heard about the forums from more than one source of advertising whether it was a poster and a teacher at school, or a friend and on the radio. This sort of combination advertising brought 12% of the attendees to the forums. Youth groups, posters and the radio were the source which notified the remaining 10%, 9% and 6% respectively about the upcoming forums for youth.

Accordingly, the recommendations for advertising future events would be to emphasize direct advertising more heavily (e.g. phone calls to youth groups and organized youth associations). Another means of attracting large groups of youth may be to have Council members go to schools or youth groups and give presentations on the upcoming event.

HOW FORUM INFORMATION REACHED PARTICIPANTS



Combined Sources = School & Newspaper
Indirect Sources = Friend, Council Member, Telephone

3. What were the most/least valuable discussions/sessions at the forum?

The "Barriers" and "Solutions" sessions were identified as the most valuable sessions by the majority of participants. The "Wrap-up" session, the panel speakers, and the panel question-and-answer period were also identified as valuable sessions during the day.

Some participants felt the first session called "National Unity: What are the Problems?" was perhaps expendable because most people were already aware of the issues. Others also felt the length of time given to the opening panel and the question-and-answer period which followed was too long.

4. Did the small group format allow you to express your opinions and contribute to the discussions? Why or Why not?

The 123 participants who completed this question agreed unanimously that the small group format was an excellent way to allow all people to express their views. This was true of people who were shy, those who were perhaps less articulate, and even the very young. In fact, many participants identified the small group format as being the best feature of the forum.

"I wasn't as shy and I spoke up more than I would have in a bigger group."

-participant in Victoria

"Everyone respected each other's opinions and the groups were small enough that everyone had a chance to speak."

-participant in Surrey

5. Did you feel you had sufficient time to complete the task put before you? Why or Why not?

While the majority of the participants (79%) felt they had sufficient time to complete the task, many acknowledged that Canadian unity was a very complex topic which could generate week-long discussions. They stated that this would not have been a realistic time frame, and, given the constraints of only one day, there was adequate time for discussion. However, 20% of the attendees said they did not have enough time and felt rushed to complete the task at hand.

6. Did the time of year that the forum was held pose a problem for you?

Seventy-nine per cent of the participants said that the timing of the forum did not cause a problem for them. However, many pointed out that holding the forums during the school year would have been better. Still others recognized that while they had experienced no problem attending the forum, the poor attendance made it evident that many other youth did have a problem with the time of year. Another suggestion for improving attendance was to hold some of the forums in the evenings.

Approximately half of the forums were held on the weekend (Saturday) while the other half were held during the week (Thursday). Although the organizers felt the forums on weekends would have higher attendance rates than weekday sessions, the actual attendance did not confirm this. If anything, in analyzing the size of the community and the attendance in that area, it would appear the forums held during the week tended to have better participation rates.

7. Do you think that holding this forum on National Unity and events similar to it is worthwhile? Why or Why not?

An overwhelming majority of participants (99%) felt that forums such as these are extremely worthwhile. Many commented on how forums are an excellent way to learn something new and have fun at the same time. The dissenting comment was a concern that most people really are not interested in this kind of thing, and thus it would be difficult to get good attendance.

"I've become more aware, and hopefully now I'll be able to do something to help the unity of our country."

-participant in Victoria

"This forum allows people to get involved and feel worthwhile. It made me feel like maybe I can help make a difference in our country."

-participant in Kamloops

COUNCIL MEMBER AND FACILITATOR EVALUATION

At the end of each forum, the moderator and facilitators participated in a debriefing session in which they shared their opinions on the outcome of the day's events. Specific questions were asked about how they enjoyed the process and if they thought the members of their groups had found it enjoyable.

In general, the facilitators and moderators were pleased with how knowledgeable and articulate the youth were on the issues. Further, they were impressed by how quickly participants were able to get focused on the issue at hand. Certainly not all participants were fully versed on all of the issues; this often reflected the age of the participants. Often the forums with older participants tended to have a higher level of discussion with the youth delving into the more complex intricacies of various positions. At other forums where the youth were generally quite young or came from more isolated areas, the discussion was at a level with which they were comfortable, and focused on issues with which the participants were most familiar. However, there was considerable variation in the contributions within each age group; some participants had done prior research or had a stronger interest in the subject, and thus had more to say.

When asked about how facilitators enjoyed using the process established for holding discussions, most said that it was a very good way to structure discussions and elicit ideas from the youth. The facilitators did however suggest that it is important to recognize differences in groups whether it be age, knowledge level or special physical or cultural differences. They felt it was very important to be flexible and to adapt the process according to the needs of the individual group. For example, there were forums at which, due to cultural differences, individuals preferred to work together when listing what they thought the issues were related to Canadian unity.

All facilitators felt that the participants had really enjoyed working in small groups of four to six people. Furthermore, they were happy with the mix of both smaller and larger group activities. Many facilitators and moderators also commented on how the youth had really enjoyed this opportunity to talk with others about Canadian unity. A real group spirit had often emerged by the end of the day, with the youth more aware that by becoming involved in a process like this one, they can make a difference.

When asked what they would do differently if they were planning a forum, a number of suggestions were given. There was unanimous agreement that the forums would be much more successful, especially in terms of attendance, if they were held during the school year. Further, it was also suggested that the event should start later in the morning and go on later in the afternoon, a start time of 10:00 a.m. was suggested. A number of comments were made about the inappropriateness of using school cafeterias. Poor acoustics sometimes made it difficult to hear the morning panel speakers or concentrate on the discussion within one small group due to the noise level from surrounding groups. Furthermore, it was often impossible to monitor the temperature of school cafeterias. In most locations where cafeterias were used, the room became unbearably warm as the day progressed; in another location, the cafeteria was so cool that participants opted to work in the much warmer hallway.

Other good ideas included giving youth some factual information to take away with them and having more team-building exercises in the beginning of the day. It was felt that if more time was allotted to building a real group feeling, youth might form their own groups to discuss Canada's future after the forums were over. Others suggested that by making personal visits to schools, the Youth Council would likely recruit larger numbers of participants.

In an attempt to tackle the problem of low attendance at the forums, facilitators and Council members were asked for suggestions. The general consensus which seemed to emerge repeatedly was that the key to high attendance figures would be to focus on recruiting groups rather than individuals. Visiting schools and meeting with youth groups were recommended.